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OO RUEHAG RUEHDBU RUEHROV RUEHSR  
DE RUEHKB #0445/01 1531158  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 021158Z JUN 09  
FM AMEMBASSY BAKU  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1302  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES PRIORITY  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 3416  
RHMFISS/CDR USEUCOM VAHINGEN GE PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 1359  
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000445

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/02/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [TU](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: TURKISH FM'S VISIT STRESSES NEED FOR  
PROGRESS ON NAGORNO-KARABAKH

REF: BAKU 392

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse, for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On May 28 Congressional Staff Delegation Markovsky and Katz met with Deputy Chief of Mission of the Turkish Embassy Erkan Ozoral. Ozoral gave a detailed account of the recent "crisis" in Turkish-Azerbaijani relations over Turkey's plan to normalize relations with Armenia. Ozoral said the crisis ended with Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan's visit to Baku on May 13, when Erdogan clearly stated to President Aliyev and to Azerbaijan's parliament that Turkey would not open its border with Armenia until there is progress on solving the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict. The May 25 visit of new Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu confirmed this message, although clarifying this is not a formal linkage. Ozoral gave the staffdel a clear message from Turkey to take back to Washington: If the U.S. wants normalization between Turkey and Armenia, then NK is the only obstacle. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On May 28 the Ambassador hosted a luncheon for visiting congressional staff delegation Alan Markovsky and Jonathan Katz with the Deputy Chief of Mission of the Embassy of Turkey in Azerbaijan, Erkan Ozoral. Ozoral began by saying that Turkey and Azerbaijan are like brothers, due to sharing a culture and language. But he stated that Turkey also has to normalize relations with Armenia. The GOAJ worries, however, that Turkey will betray Azerbaijan in this process by opening its border with Armenia, thereby losing Azerbaijan's most important leverage over Armenia. Ozoral stated that the GOAJ was supportive of the normalization process at first, as GOT leadership made clear to the GOAJ that it would not betray Azerbaijan.

¶3. (C) However, two events led to a crisis over this issue. The first was the local elections in Turkey, which distracted Erdogan from this issue and therefore left the GOAJ uninformed. Secondly, the February 17 article on Armenian Radio Liberty which stated that the GOT would open its border with Armenia in exchange for full normalization, without linkage to NK, scared the GOAJ. Ozoral stated that the GOAJ began an organized campaign against Turkey, with protests in front of the Turkish Embassy and many letters delivered as well. Official newspapers also contained attacks on Turkey. Ozoral stated that Turkish public opinion supported Azerbaijan on this issue, and there were protests in Turkey as well.

¶4. (C) This crisis in relations ended with the visit of

Prime Minister Erdogan to Baku (reftel). Erdogan met with President Aliyev privately and also gave a speech in Azerbaijan's parliament, and in both events stated that the GOT would not open its border with Armenia until there is progress on NK. Ozoral was careful to point out that while Erdogan used the words "solution to the problem" while in Baku, he issued a later statement which clarified this to mean "progress on a solution." Ozoral also noted that this did not constitute formal linkage of the two issues, but merely the reality that progress on both issues was mutually reinforcing. The May 25 visit of new Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu confirmed this message. Ozoral says that the GOAJ is pleased with this message, and relations are back to their "brotherly" state.

15. (C) Ozoral was very clear that the GOT wants to normalize relations with Armenia as soon as possible. The GOAJ's reaction as well as that of the Turkish public has made it clear, however, that there needs to be some progress on NK before this normalization can take place. Ozoral's clear message to the USG was that if the U.S. wants normalization to take place, NK is the last obstacle. Armenia must take steps to find a solution, so the GOT can convince the Turkish public that normalization is the right course. Ozoral stated that Sargsian was not constructive at the May 8 Minsk Group meeting in Prague, and that Armenia must make steps on NK before the GOT can make steps on normalization.

16. (C) On a related subject, Ozoral stated that after the August war in Georgia, the GOT recognized the immediate need to solve all of the remaining conflicts in the Caucasus.

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This was the reason for the creation of the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform. Ozoral reported that the group, consisting of Turkey, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia had met three times already at the level of Deputy Foreign Minister. Azeri Deputy FM Araz Azimov represents the GOAJ in these meetings. The group will meet again in June, and Ozoral believes they can work out the last organizational details at this meeting, and then can elevate the group to the Foreign Minister level.

COMMENT

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17. (C) Throughout the conversation, Ozoral was open and frank, not seeming to hold back any information. He clearly conveyed the GOT's frustration that its normalization plans with Armenia are being delayed by the lack of progress on NK.

Ozoral seems to blame Sargsian and Armenia, rather than Azerbaijan, for failing to make the necessary compromises on NK. He was similarly open about how surprised his government was that Azerbaijan could appeal so directly and successfully to Turkish public opinion on this issue. After the Georgian war, Ozoral believes Russia would now support a solution to NK, and therefore the GOT is asking the USG to make clear to the Armenian government that if it wants normalization with Turkey, it has to make some steps towards an NK solution.

DERSE